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## **A. Introduction**

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# Introduction

## The Planning Vision

For 250 years, the Town of Leesburg has evolved from a rural hamlet to the commercial center of western Loudoun County, the fastest growing county in the nation. The pressures for growth in the Town are the result of the robust regional economy that will continue to draw more businesses, government jobs and residents. Leesburg's challenge and planning vision is to accommodate its share of that growth while retaining and enhancing the Town's character and quality of life.

Town character is of paramount importance to Leesburg. In particular, the Old and Historic District is the basis of Leesburg's identity. It is a compact, energizing mix of land uses; its blocks and buildings are pleasingly and conveniently human scaled; its streets, with automobiles tamed, glimpses of historic landmarks, and intimate views of architectural details, invite walking; its civic squares and rustic W & OD trail offer counterpoints of

nature within a richly human environment.

Other portions of the Town have a different character. There is a strong residential component of the community that was designed and built upon the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century subdivision model where more uniform uses and large lots, curved streets and culs-de-sac dominate the landscape. These residential areas also need protection as growth continues.

The planning vision for the foreseeable future is to continue the diversity in economic and housing opportunities in a manner that reflects the best and essential qualities of the old and historic downtown. Leesburg will maintain a high quality of life by providing a full range of community facilities and services and diverse economic opportunities, protecting natural and heritage resources, and protecting against negative environmental impacts.

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## Powers of the Plan

A comprehensive plan is an instrument of government that is designed to give a local jurisdiction within the Commonwealth of Virginia responsibility for managing development, services and public infrastructure. The legal basis for the plan is established in the *Code of Virginia*, Section 15.2-2223, which states:

the local planning commission  
shall prepare and recommend a

comprehensive plan for the  
physical development of the  
territory within its  
jurisdiction...[to achieve] a  
coordinated, adjusted and  
harmonious development of  
territory which will, in  
accordance with present and  
probable future needs and  
resources, best promote the  
health, safety, morals, order,

convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants.

According to the code, the comprehensive plan is general in nature and may include, but is not limited to, the designation of land use, transportation systems, community facilities and services, historic areas, etc. The code also identifies methods of implementation, such as a zoning ordinance or a map of zoning districts, a subdivision ordinance and a capital improvements plan.

A comprehensive plan includes a concise statement of the community's goals for long-range development, as well as objectives for implementing the goals. The goals provide general direction based on the aspirations of the community. Objectives provide further direction for achieving an aspect of a goal.

This Town Plan serves those purposes for the Town of Leesburg. More particularly, it serves as the general guide for the Town Council in its legislative role, the Planning Commission in its advisory role, the Board of Zoning Appeals, Town staff, citizens, and land-owners with respect to directing development and redevelopment in the Town.

This Plan contains goals and objectives that are designed to guide land use and development decisions. The full implementation of some of the Plan objectives necessitates modifications of certain ordinances and regulations, preparation of more specific development guidance, and research of additional methods to implement Plan objectives. The additional efforts needed to do these are detailed in an Action Program that is attached as an appendix to this Plan.

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## 2005 Town Plan Process

An update of the 1997 Town Plan was undertaken between 2003 and winter 2005. This process included 1) public participation in ten vision and sector discussion meetings; 2) a Plan audit consisting of an assessment of Plan implementation to date and a comparison of Town and County planning objectives; and 3) development of comprehensive background reports for every Plan element.

The background reports contain a critique of the 1997 Plan elements, an examination of existing conditions, a series of findings and conclusions pointed to elements and concepts in the 1997 Plan that needed to be updated and reconstituted. Each of the reports was reviewed at joint public

meetings held by the Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, and Environmental Advisory Commission; other Town commissions were specifically invited to meetings where a report covering a subject under their purview was discussed.

The draft plan was delivered to the three commissions in February 2005. Based on discussions at workshops, a revised draft was prepared, which was the subject of a public hearing before the Planning Commission. The Commission submitted its final draft of the Plan to Town Council, who held public hearing on July 26, 2005. Based on that public hearing, Town Council adopted this Town Plan by ordinance on September 13, 2005.

## Regional and Local Planning Context

Leesburg is intimately connected to the larger region in a variety of ways. The Town's economy is dependent upon the regional economy. Leesburg's transportation system is a small but important segment of the region's. Regional environmental issues have consequences for Leesburg, whose air and water resources are inextricable from those of the region. Planning for Leesburg cannot ignore the relationships between the Town and its neighbors.

Leesburg is part of the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). An MSA is defined as a city and associated areas that are marked by a high degree of economic and social integration with the city. The MSA not only includes the District of Columbia and its suburbs in Northern Virginia and central Maryland, but it also extends to Fredericksburg, Va. and Jefferson County, W. Va. The MSA is part of a larger combined metropolitan area that extends to Baltimore, Md., and Winchester, W. Va.

The MSA is home to 5 million residents and a very strong economy driven by the presence of the federal government. In addition to employment in the government sector, the MSA's economy benefits from corporate headquarters, professional and industrial associations, and non-profit organizations, as well as Maryland and Northern Virginia's biotechnology, high technology, and educational sectors. All of this provides significant opportunities for economic growth. As a part of this larger region, Leesburg is subject to the regional growth pressures.

The round 7.0 projections of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) indicate that by 2030 the region will become home to 2,426,300 households (42 percent growth since 2000) and 4,104,900 jobs (44 percent growth). MWCOG projects Leesburg's share of households to be 21,787 (111 percent growth) and jobs to be 31,268 (188 percent growth).

Transportation is critical to the flow of goods, services, and commuters in this vast metropolitan area. In many ways, traffic and transportation are beyond the control of the Town. With Leesburg being in the midst of Loudoun County's voluminous growth, traffic from development in the County will increase the traffic impact on the Town's roads. Transportation planning and funding is complicated by the nature of the region and the fact that several public and some private transportation organizations provide services across governmental boundaries. Perhaps the most critical public finance issue for the region is increasing transportation funding. The fact that Leesburg has no local independent funding source for transportation and that it has no direct representation at the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority is a major challenge.

Regional transportation planners have only recently been trying to address the vital relationship between transportation and land use. The interstate nature of the situation is further exacerbated by the separation of regional transportation decisions from local land use decisions.

Leesburg's location at the crossroads of two major highways, Rt. 7 and U. S. Rt. 15, and at the western end of Dulles Greenway is a critical point in the region's highway network. The long-range proposal is to extend the Metro Orange line to Leesburg but uncertain funding, timing, and station locations complicate the Town's ability to effectively plan for it.

Two particular environmental resources tie Leesburg to the rest of the region. Air and water quality, which are affected by local decisions throughout the region, are subject to regulations applied at the regional level. The metropolitan Washington region is in "non-attainment" for ozone according to the provisions of the Clean Air Act. Leesburg is a small part of the metropolitan Washington region for air quality planning purposes. However, though the Town is not a major

contributor to the air quality attainment issue any penalties given that reduce federal infrastructure funds to the region would apply to Leesburg as well.

The Federal Clean Water Act, because of the reduced quality of the region's streams, requires all jurisdictions to comply with regulations pertaining to stormwater flowing from yards, parking lots, and streets into watercourses, the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System.

This Town Plan recognizes the influence of these regional issues on Leesburg. They translate into tremendous opportunities but also potentially negative impacts. The challenge to the Town is how well it can take advantage of the opportunities while minimizing the negatives.

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## Urban Growth Area and the Joint Land Management Area

Leesburg's Urban Growth Area (UGA) is situated almost entirely to the south and east of the corporate limits and contains about 7,000 acres. The UGA was established in the 1991 General Plan and designated by the County in consultation with the Town. In that plan the County recognized that the concept of the UGA as a means to guide growth in the area around the Town. The policies established in the 1991 General Plan committed to a framework for joint planning and development review by the Town and the County within the UGA, which became the planning area used in the 1997 Town Plan.

The 2001 Loudoun County General Plan updated the UGA and re-established it as

a Joint Land Management Area (JLMA). The JLMA boundary of the 2001 Plan is similar to the Urban Growth Area of the 1991 General Plan and the 1997 Town Plan, but reduced in area. Also reduced in the 2001 General Plan are the densities of residential developments in a portion of the UGA, the removal of Crosstrail Boulevard between the Dulles Greenway and Route 15, the removal of land areas between Route 15 and the Dulles Greenway, and the elimination of a small portion of the UGA on the north side of the Route 15 corporate limits.

From Leesburg's perspective, establishment of the JLMA was not a true joint planning effort, nor were the boundaries mutually agreed upon. As a

result, this Town Plan continues to use the UGA as the extent of its area of extraterritorial planning, in which the Town wishes to make land use recommendations to the County. Nevertheless, it is understood that the County retains jurisdictional authority over areas outside the Town's boundaries.

Upon adoption, this Plan will be used by the Town to initiate a new joint planning effort. It is important for several reasons. Only through joint planning will Leesburg create compatible land uses outside of the Town. This is critical for the future of Leesburg Executive Airport and for the Town's economic development goal to diversify its tax base. In addition, traffic generated outside the Town will make use of roads leading to and through Leesburg. Finally, it is important, with significant fiscal implications, to ensure that the Town's goals and coverage areas for water and sewer service be stated in the Town Plan.

In addition to the UGA/JLMA, the Town and County have another planning relationship. The Annexation Area Development Policies (AADPs) date from the Town's annexation of almost 10,000 acres in 1984 and are in effect until 2009. The AADPs are land use policies, as well as policies for providing community facilities to support those land uses, for the newly annexed area (generally between the Bypass and the Town's current boundaries). The AADPs also established a joint committee to review the policies every five years' although the scheduled 2004 review did not take place.

The AADPs were in part based on an earlier joint planning effort, the Leesburg Area Management Plan (LAMP). LAMP became the basis for policies in the 1991 and subsequent County General plans and the 1986 and 1997 Town plans.

A renewed joint planning effort will establish a mutually agreeable plan that will guide development regardless of the jurisdictional boundaries.

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## Plan Implementation and Monitoring

The 2005 Town Plan is a dynamic document, which is actively used by the Town Council, the Planning Commission, Town government staff, and the public at large to formulate and guide decisions about the built and natural environments. Both the public and private sectors are participants in development, and implementation of the Plan is a joint effort.

In order to ensure that the Plan has a dynamic character, the community and the Town government need to review and update the Plan on a frequent basis,

perhaps more often than the five year mandate by the Code of Virginia given the pressure for increased development in Leesburg and Loudoun County. Citizen participation in the planning process is a critical element in making the Town Plan successful.

### Plan Implementation

There are a number of mechanisms for implementing the Town's planning goals and objectives. Some of these are described below.

**The Comprehensive Plan:** The Plan itself is a mechanism for defining and implementing the Town's planning goals. The Plan's goals and objectives are considered when producing small area plans, in evaluating legislative applications (rezonings, special exceptions, and their amendments) and reviewing requests for Plan amendments. The Plan contains specific guidance for the Town's decision-makers regarding land use, housing, economic development, community facilities and services, community design, heritage resources and natural resources and environmental protection. There is some guidance for specific geographic areas throughout the Town, referred to as "sectors" in this Plan, as well as general guidance for realizing goals and objectives, town-wide.

**The Zoning Ordinance:** The Zoning Ordinance is adopted in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of Leesburg. It is intended that the Ordinance will implement and be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Town Plan. Within the Ordinance are regulations for specific aspects of development and redevelopment, such as land use, type of building and building bulk and setback; parking, pedestrian access, size of lots, flood protection, sign regulation and building height.

Some uses are allowed by right and others may require special exceptions. There are a series of zoning districts generally related to type of development and land use, each with specific requirements related to development. Several objectives of this plan will require Zoning Ordinance amendments in order to administer intent and vision.

**Subdivision Regulations:** The Town's Subdivision and Land Development Regulations (SLDR) is the governmental

instrument that provides procedures and regulations for the subdivision and development of land within the Town. The intent of the subdivision and development regulations is to encourage the development of safe and attractive residential neighborhoods and nonresidential developments; ensure the provision of appropriate public street access between and among adjacent properties; ensure adequate provision for drainage and appropriate arrangements of buildings and parking areas on the site and with nearby properties; obtain public right-of-way, easements and other public land dedications, consistent with the Town Plan; maintain appropriate buffers between potentially incompatible land uses; discourage development on steep slopes and in floodplains; and encourage preservation of historical, archaeological, and significant natural features and landmarks.

**Design Requirements for Community Facilities and Public Infrastructure:** The Town's Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) controls the type, extent and design of all public facilities that must be provided for development, redevelopment and public infrastructure projects. Design standards for the physical infrastructure may have an impact on adjacent land uses, natural and historic resources and community design. Some of the objectives in this plan will require revisions to the DCSM.

**Capital Improvements Program:** The capital improvements program (CIP) is a document that is designed to guide the efficient and cost-effective provision of community facilities. The planning of facilities involves projecting future needs for a five-year period, as well as defining current deficiencies and priorities based on the fiscal policies established by the Town government. By looking beyond

year-to-year budgeting to project what, where and how capital investments should be made, capital programming enables government entities and agencies to continually maintain an effective level of public services. The CIP is meant to implement the community facilities and services element of the Comprehensive Plan. The CIP is restructured on an annual basis.

**Action Program:** The Town Plan Action Program, an appendix to the Town Plan, is a set of tasks that are designed to accomplish a number of objectives discussed throughout the Plan. These tasks include such elements as developing a comprehensive set of community design guidelines, establishing a Plan monitoring process, developing creative ways to provide more affordable housing, and specific modifications that can be made to the Town's development regulations.

The Action Program provides the general timeframe for completing the tasks and identifies the staff and agencies responsible for the work. Following plan adoption, the staff will develop a specific

annual work program to accomplish the Action Program.

### Plan Monitoring

The public and the government of Leesburg should measure the effectiveness of the Town Plan periodically.

A monitoring process will include a full analytical and statistical annual report regarding 1) the status of elements in the Action Program, and 2) land development, and 3) the provision of capital facilities and services, and 4) the balance of housing and jobs, and 5) the ratio of residential and non-residential general fund revenue, and 6) current perspectives on planning issues and conditions, and 7) new planning related information on such subjects as the economy, population; 8) federal, state and County laws and planning policies; and 9) environmental impacts, public concerns, etc. The Action Program discussed in the Plan Implementation section above includes a task to develop a Plan monitoring process.

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## Plan Amendment Process

The Plan is a dynamic public governing instrument that should be tuned periodically because both internal and external forces are always at work and changing. *Code of Virginia* Section 15.2-2230 requires a comprehensive examination of comprehensive plans every five years. Given the vitality of the forces that affect such a high growth area, Leesburg may reexamine aspects of the Plan more frequently as circumstances seem to dictate. The periodic Plan

monitoring process is designed to provide a comprehensive report of changed facts, conditions, and the evolving status of Plan implementation. This, and a formal survey of citizen planning and services concerns, is often the basis for making decisions about the need for amending the Town Plan. In addition, a developer or citizen may also apply to amend the Town Plan. *Code of Virginia* Section 15.2-2229 outlines those procedures.



## How to Use the Plan

The Town Plan consists of an introduction and a series of Plan elements or subject categories. The introduction provides information on the purpose and powers of the Plan, the 2005 Town Plan process, and the regional and local planning context for the Plan, Plan implementation and monitoring, the Plan amendment process and how to use the Plan. The Plan elements, or subject categories, include natural resources, heritage resources, housing, economic development, land use, community design, transportation, parks and recreation, and community facilities and services. The Plan elements sections are designed to provide an overall goal for each subject category and to explain the nature and importance of the goal. The section goes on to detail a series of objectives that are in turn designed to implement the overall goal. These objectives suggest specific actions that will create an outcome that supports the goal. There are many levels of detail in the various objectives, depending upon the need to provide development guidance.

The Plan objectives for every Plan element are to be used as the criteria and guide for evaluating legislative applications, such as rezonings, special exceptions, or amendments to those that exist. The Town Plan also provides guidance for developing the Town's capital improvements program.

Environmental protection is a theme found in several elements, with major emphasis in the natural resources element. While there is no element with the term "environment" in the title, it is an important concept in the Plan. Land use planning and development should

progress with consideration for the protection and restoration of ecologically valuable land and concern for environmental health that impacts the well-being of the Town's residents as well as its natural systems.

The background reports that were developed prior to the 2005 Town Plan provide the analysis of planning issues that form the basis for the Plan. These reports, which are available at the Department of Planning, Zoning and Development and on the Town's web site, can be used as a reference to gain insight into the planning conditions and issues that are the basis for the Plan's objectives.

The Town Plan consists of Plan text and a series of Plan maps that are adjuncts to the text. The Plan text always provides the guidance for land use and community facilities decisions. The maps are provided as conceptual references so that an overall, generalized picture of Plan objectives can be formed regarding the subject matter of the map.

Finally, the Town Plan is supplemented by an Action Program, which lists specific tasks to be performed to implement the plan. A timeframe in which to begin each task and an identification of Town departments and commissions responsible for the tasks are included in the Action Program.

**Questions regarding any aspect of the Town Plan or the Town's planning process and related schedules should be directed to the Department of Planning, Zoning and Development at (703) 771-2765. This information will**

be kept up to date on the Town's

website, [www.leesburgva.gov](http://www.leesburgva.gov).